

CORRESPONDENCE

100th Anniversary of a great victory over typhus

It is a well known fact that louse-borne epidemic typhus is still alive [1]. Fortunately, nowadays we can stop the spread of this malady by simply delousing, a procedure that is one of the greatest achievements of prophylaxis.

Who was the first to conceive of the idea that lice transmit typhus? I believe that it is impossible to know who originated the idea, although it has been stated that in a 1606 monograph by Tobias Cober, an English physician, the importance of lice in the production of typhus was recognized [2].

Who was the first to fight against a typhus epidemic by carrying out a procedure in accordance with the idea that lice transmit the disease? To my knowledge, a Spanish physician, Carlos María Cortezo (1850–1933) [3], was the first to do so. The epidemic occurred in Madrid, Spain in 1903, and he coped with it successfully. At that time, he regarded lice as transmitters of typhus. I believe that he regarded not only lice, but also other ectoparasites, as transmitters of such a disease; and I believe that he did not know about any others who had earlier had this idea. Cortezo reported his success in Paris on Friday, 13 November 1903, in front of a scientific audience

[4], after his successful struggle against the epidemic by removing ectoparasites.

In view of these data and with the *suum cuique* principle in mind, on the occasion of the centennial of that triumph, I put forward the name of Cortezo as crucial in the history of typhus.

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